

The Temple of God 1 Peter 2:4-12

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Church Matters

I wonder if you've ever realized how many of your favorite books or movies could be considered "frame stories." A frame story, as the name implies, is a story within a story. It's a literary structure where a main narrative sets the context for a second one. The intro and conclusion create a "frame" around what otherwise appears to be a self-contained story of its own. *The Princess Bride* is a frame story—the story of Westley and Buttercup is set within the framework of a grandfather reading to his grandson who's sick in bed with a cold. *Forest Gump* tells the story of America through the eyes of a dull but kind young man, set within the framework of people waiting on a bench at a bus stop. There are countless others—*1001 Nights*, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Frankenstein*, several books in Stephen King's *Dark Tower* series.

Often the frame is just decoration, but occasionally it shapes the whole meaning of the story. For example, *Field of Dreams* isn't a movie primarily about baseball or Shoeless Joe Jackson or heaven or even following your dreams. It's a story about the longing a man feels for relationship with his father—but only the frame will tell you that.

Why am I telling you this? Because ***the Bible itself is a frame story***—the kind where, if you miss the introduction and the conclusion, you might misunderstand the point of the whole thing. It's not a book primarily about commandments. Nor fairy tale stories like Jonah & the whale or David & Goliath. Nor abstractions like philosophy, worldview, or even religion. The frame rules out all of those options.

The Bible opens in a garden paradise called "Eden" where God and His people live and walk together in love and joy, and it ends in a garden-city called the "New Jerusalem" where God dwells with His people in paradise forevermore. ***The Bible tells the epic tale of a loving God overcoming all obstacles to take a people to Himself, be their God, and make His home among them.***

If you don't understand that, your reading of the Bible will be imbalanced at best and flat wrong at worst. And you won't understand or feel what the Holy Spirit intends you to understand and feel when it

makes claims like this (from the bookmark for this series):

Ephesians 2:19-21 *You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family.²⁰ Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself.²¹ We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.*

Impressive claims, but they lose their impact unless you realize that this is what the whole Bible is about from start to finish—God making His home in the midst of His holy people. And it's finally here in the church!

So that's what we're going to examine this morning.

- First, we'll take a few minutes to look at the Bible's framework that starts and ends with the whole earth portrayed as God's temple.
- Next, we'll look at 1 Peter 2:4-12—a key passage that shows the church as God's new temple.
- And finally, we'll consider some implications for our own lives.

The Bible's "Temple" Framework

According to the Bible's opening and closing chapters, ***God's original purpose was to make Planet Earth a massive, holy temple where He lives with His people.*** Genesis presents earth as a construction site, prepared and ready to build; Revelation portrays it as a finished city.

Genesis 1-2 establishes the theme. Consider:

- As a garden, Eden was filled with trees, flowers, and fruit.
- Gold and onyx were noteworthy (2:11-12).
- The entrance to Eden is on the east side. After the Fall, it was guarded by cherubim.

In and of themselves, none of these features seems remarkable until you read that the tabernacle shared every one: entrance on the east, guarded by cherubim, filled with gold and onyx, decorated with all kinds of garden plants and other images. When you read the chapters describing the tabernacle and the temple, it's clear these structures were patterned after the Garden of Eden. In other words, Eden was God's original temple.

Add to that these other considerations:

- Eden is called "the holy mountain of God" (Ez 28:14), matching

the ancient custom of building temples on high places.

- In Genesis 1-2, God created Eden (and the rest of the world) in 6 days, culminating in a day of rest. In Exodus 25-31, God revealed plans for the Tabernacle in 6 clearly marked segments, culminating in the Sabbath of rest (Ex 31:12-17).
- The Lord God walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Several times His presence in the tabernacle is described as “walking” among His people, Israel (Lev 26:11-12, Dt 23:14).
- The verbs used of Adam’s duties in Eden—“to work it and keep it”—are used in combination elsewhere in the Law only to describe the duties of Levites in the tabernacle (Num 3:7-8, 8:26, 18:5-6). Interestingly, the verb rendered “keep” is used of the Levites’ responsibility to guard the tabernacle from corruption and keep it holy.

The point of all this, again, is that Eden was not just a Garden; it was a Temple. It was the residence of God Himself, with Adam and Eve appointed to function as priests—serving Him, communing with Him, tending His sanctuary, and guarding it against the infiltration of evil.

Now consider this: Adam and Eve were directed 1) to multiply and fill the earth with offspring and 2) to subdue the earth and have dominion over it. The point of these instructions seems to be that God intended for the temple-paradise of Eden to expand and eventually fill the whole planet. In other words, Eden was a blueprint demonstrating God’s intention to turn Planet Earth one huge, holy temple where He would live with His people.

Think of it: in this vast universe of space, stars, and planets, the Creator chose this one for His home. ***Planet Earth was God’s choice for His personal residence, the footstool for His feet, His temple. His intent was that, through the faithful work of human beings, Eden would spread out and eventually fill the whole earth.*** Adam and Eve and all their descendants would serve Him as priests in His temple, representing Him to the whole cosmos as they subdued the earth and exercised dominion over it. This was His plan. This was our calling.

Of course, we all know how Adam failed in His God-given duty to keep Eden holy and be holy himself. The serpent entered, mankind fell into

sin, and paradise was lost. God withdrew from earth to heaven, still actively involved in the affairs of men but not living among them again until the Tabernacle was built during the time of Moses.

But even then, it was nothing like Eden. At the heart of the Tabernacle was the “Holy of Holies,” a perfect cube, 15’ in each dimension, covered in gold, where God lived. God was once again on earth, but in a carefully protected container; with His people, but separated from them.

The Incarnation of Jesus brings us to a few years where God again lived among His people—an act John refers to as Jesus’ “tabernacling” among us. Jesus Himself claimed His body was the temple, the new meeting place where God and men can once again come together in fellowship.

And then we come to the end, the final frame in Revelation 21-22. There we find a city, New Jerusalem, which has some familiar features:

- Equal length, width, height (21:16)—obviously an unusual shape for a city (only one other cubical structure in the Bible...)
- Whole city is overlaid with pure gold (21:18)

The point is, this whole city is now an expanded Holy of Holies, which is what the text itself suggests:

v22 *And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.*

The whole city is one massive temple. But not just any temple. Notice:

22:1-2 *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life¹ with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

It’s Eden restored! But this time, it’s not a construction site waiting to expand; it’s a finished city so massive, the numbers suggest it fills the earth. ***The tiny “container” where God formerly resided in the temple now encompasses the entire planet.*** The point is, this whole city—perhaps the whole earth—has become the house of God where He lives with His people:

21:3 *I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place [tabernacle] of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”*

Finally, at long last, God’s original intention has been realized.

The Church as God's New Temple

1 Peter 2:4-5 *As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

Peter uses the term “spiritual house,” but with priests offering sacrifices, it’s clear the building he’s referring to is a temple. What building is this? It’s YOU—believers, “living stones” (v5) “built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Eph 1:22).

Wanna know what it means to be the church? This: that we together are the Holy of Holies. We are the Garden of Eden. We are the present image of the New Jerusalem. But in the church, God no longer lives *among* His people; now He dwells *within* them.

Wanna get close to the divine presence? Don’t head out into nature. Don’t look deep within yourself. Gather with your church! The church is the temple of the living God, meaning this is the only place on earth where God Himself dwells.

Just like God originally planned, this new temple is spiritual and worldwide, not physical and localized. Its foundation does not rest on top of some mountain; it runs to and fro throughout the earth—the teaching and ministry of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Himself as the cornerstone. And the stones of its construction? The saints of God, “joined together, grow[ing] into a holy temple in the Lord.”

Implications

1. Be Engaged.

Worship is not a spectator sport. The Sunday gathering of the church is not a show you are here to watch. It is a group activity you are here to engage in with the rest of us.

v5 *...you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

Worship in the New Covenant temple isn’t restricted to the gatherings

of the church. In fact, when the NT speaks of offering sacrifices, it never thinks in terms of your activities here, in this building, where the church meets.

Romans 12:1 *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

You are functioning like a priest when you surrender your body.

Likewise when you give praise or gifts of mercy to others:

Hebrews 13:15-16 *Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.*

2. Be Holy.

v5 *...a holy priesthood*

v9 *...a holy nation*

vv11-12 *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*

Our holiness matters, not because the church is morally superior to everyone else, but because **the church represents and houses a God who is**. His plan is to fill the whole earth with His glory. The church is the “container” wherein He resides.

This is why church discipline matters. We will not be like Adam and Eve, who idly stood by while evil entered God’s temple.

3. Be Loved.

vv9-10 *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

Ultimately, what it means to be God’s temple is that you have been specially selected by God to be part of the dwelling where He lives. You are so precious to Him, He picked you to represent Him to the rest of creation.

Verses 4 & 6 say that Jesus is “chosen and precious” to the Father. Now

verses 9-10 say that's true of you, too:

v9 ...*a chosen race... a people for His own possession.*

That last phrase comes across a bit too bland. Perhaps a more suitable rendering would be "His own special people." The idea is that, although God owns every single thing in the universe, some of His possessions are extra special to Him. He cherishes them, like the wealthy woman whose jewelry box is filled with bracelets, necklaces, and earrings; but who values that engagement ring above all the others. Some possessions have special meaning. For God, the apple of His eye is the people He purchased with the precious blood of His own Son.

4. Believe

vv6-7 *For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." ⁷ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"*

Jesus was rejected so you could be chosen and loved. Your lack of holiness deserved rejection and exile—that's the point of the whole middle part of the Bible's frame story. But because Jesus experienced your exile, you welcomed home to live with God forever.

Hebrews 13:12 *Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.*

All these other applications grow out of this one. Be engaged in worship like a priest because YOU ARE a priest. Be holy inside and out because YOU ARE holy. The gospel makes you these things. Now grow up into what you've been given.